

4 Marks of a Healthy Church

1 Corinthians 16

What does a healthy church look like? Do you know what you should be looking for? Do you know how you can participate in building a healthy church? Healthy churches, and healthy Christians, don't happen by accident. They become healthy by intentionally pursuing the few things that really matter.

Have you ever shopped for a used car? Challenging experience. What do you look for? Probably a few mechanically inclined people who know just what to look for, but most of us don't. Do I like the color? Is it shiny? Does it smell nice? New tires? We tend to look at superficial things that are easy to fix, and overlook the more fundamental things that make a car reliable.

Majority of you will leave here some day. Not just students; there is a lot of movement in and out of a university town. You will have to kick the tires on a new-to-you church. How will you choose? How will you know if the church is healthy or not?

While you stay here, how can you help this church become a healthier church?

Many characteristics of a healthy church in New Testament. Final chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul addresses 4 important qualities/marks of a healthy church. "These are things I should look for; these are areas where I can contribute."

READ 1 Corinthians 16:1-4

4 Marks of a Healthy Church

1. Healthy churches... GIVE to the needy – 1 Corinthians 16:1-4

- Background: Who is this collection for?
 - o Acts 11:27-30
 - Began to hit Roman Empire in AD 40-41. Crop failures in Egypt
 - Hit Judea especially hard in AD 45-47
 - AD 39 Emperor Gaius Caligula ordered his statue erected in the Temple, so Jews refused to plant their crops
 - Jewish Christians, ostracized from the Temple, received no assistance from other Jews
 - As Paul traveled, he began to collect for Christians in Judea
 - o Romans 15:25-26
 - o America is a fairly generous culture. Not so among Greeks in Paul's day. Paul's perspective on giving unprecedented in Greek world
 - Only gave to people who could return some favor
 - Giving was a form of manipulation
 - Plutarch: "Rulers should show philanthropy to their friends and the friends should shower them with love and honor."
 - New Testament urges a very different philosophy of giving – Luke 6:35
 - o Urged churches to participate. 1 Cor & 2 Cor gives guidance on giving

- **Characteristics of healthy/godly giving – unpack 1 Cor 16:2**
 - o Regular/consistent. Habit. – 16:2
 - *Power of Habit.* Don't have to think each time. Becomes a part of you
 - Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny."
 - Become a generous person
 - If we don't give, we become insecure
 - If we don't give we become greedy
 - 2 Cor 9:5
 - Greed undermines worship
 - Sermon on the Mount – no one can serve to masters
 - o Universally – 16:2. "each one of you"
 - o Proportionally – "As he may prosper" – 2 Cor 8:12-15
 - No set amount. Tithing was OT concept.
 - 10% came first as a reminder that God owns all
 - NT doesn't affirm or condemn
 - Old Testament actually had freewill offerings, special offerings for the poor, all debts forgiven every 7 years, margin for poor to glean in fields; culture of generosity.
 - Give as you have received, both spiritually and financially.
 - o Generously – 2 Cor 8:1-4
 - You may not have much. Start small.
 - o Joyfully – 16:2. "So that no collections be made when I come"
 - Not guilt, shame or compulsion. Opportunity to worship God.
 - 2 Cor 9:7. Not the amount but the heart
 - Ex – widow's coins
- **How can we apply this principle?**
 - o "People in Need" fund
 - Church pictured as family. Care for our own.
 - Deacons/staff identify significant financial needs. Medical; job loss
 - o Community Partners
 - Brazos Church Food Pantry
 - Aggieland Pregnancy Outreach
 - Hope Pregnancy Center
 - SOS Ministries
 - The Bridge Ministries
 - physical and financial assistance coupled with the Gospel
 - Contact directly; our office; website ("serve")
 - o Persecuted Christians
 - Breakaway: Shalom Fund. Middle East and Africa
 - o Your family – 1 Tim 5:8
 - o Your giving will shift as circumstances change
 - family needs arise
 - Become very intentional in your giving
 - Meet physical/financial needs with a view toward the gospel

2. Healthy churches... **RESPECT their spiritual leaders** – 16:15-19

- Respect, honor, submission to authority is hard
 - o TEST: What is the attitude of the church toward spiritual authority?
 - o Does church honor/care for elders/deacons, pastors and missionaries?

A. Healthy churches honor their elders and deacons

- 1st c. house church structure
 - elders – spiritual needs
 - deacons – physical and financial needs
- 3 men mentioned, most likely elders in churches of Corinth
- 16:16. “Submit” – to place under
 - Spiritual leaders are not unaccountable
 - Plurality => accountability; to one another; to you; votes
- 16:18. “Acknowledge”/“Recognize”
 - Heb 13:17; 1 Thess 5:12-13a
 - High calling; hard calling. Behind the scenes, early mornings, late nights, don’t get paid (1 Tim 5:17-18)
 - Our church has enjoyed health for many years
 - Tested. Survived testing because of strong elder board
- Team of deacons – easier to spot because they are wearing name tags
 - Come early, stay late, find open seats, not paid
 - Tell them THANKS

B. Healthy churches support their pastor-teachers – 1 Cor 9:7-14; Gal 6:6

- Awkward topic; seems self-serving
- Our church has always taken care of its pastors financially. THANKS!
- Pray for us more. Protection; families, kids, marriages, health, spiritual life would not become just a part of our jobs
- Home church leaders/SS/B. St. Don’t get paid, but sacrifice to serve you.

C. Healthy churches care for their missionaries – 16:5-12

- Paul, Timothy, Apollos were missionaries.
 - Not from Corinth. Didn’t stay there long.
 - Moved about, planting and strengthening churches.
- Send – 16:6, 11
 - Money, supplies, companions – Phil 1:3-5; 4:16-18
 - Healthy churches SEND missionaries
 - Identify, equip
 - Refresh – 16:18
- How?
 - In a small group? You already have a missionary.
 - Pray, give, go visit, send packages, emails, Skype
 - Return – have over for dinner
 - Globaloutreach@grace-bible.org

3. Healthy churches... GUARD the essentials – 1 Corinthians 16:13

- Church has always been and will always be under attack until Jesus returns
- How is the church threatened?
 - Persecution. Physical and social/cultural
 - Physical not greatest threat. Church normally grows stronger.
 - Division. Unresolved conflict; refusal to reconcile/forgive
 - Immorality undisciplined
 - Legalism – adding to faith
 - False teaching
 - Risk of compromise – sin, sexuality, exclusivity of Jesus
 - Gospel itself. 1 Cor 15:1

- Be aware and be prepared – 1 Cor 16:13; 1 Peter 5:8; 2 Thess 2:15; Phil 1:27
 - o Know what you believe and why you believe it
 - o Churches that compromise die. Liberal church in America.

4. Healthy churches... LOVE one another – 16:14, 24

- All?! Comprehensive!
- 1 Cor 13:13
- John 13:34-35 – by this will all men know...
 - o Not mere emotion, but choice to serve and sacrifice; washing feet
 - o A healthy church is packed with outwardly focused individuals
- We can change lots of behaviors, but only God can change our hearts

Application

After I graduated, I moved away from College Station. Visited a lot of churches.

- Teaching the word
- Good leadership
- Missionaries
- No one talked to me in a meaningful way. No one invited me to lunch.
- Started to get frustrated, bitter.
- Brian, you initiate. This is a good church. Perhaps you can bring something to help them become even stronger.
- I asked people to lunch; I found a place to serve.

No perfect churches. This is not a perfect church

- Look for the fundamentals
- Help a good church become a better church by bringing your gifts, talents, time and vision